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ABSTRACT

The authors present the DALSTRA model of decision making, a descriptive statement of ways individuals or groups respond to different kinds of decision-making problems they encounter. Decision making is viewed in two phases: the decision-making antecedents (whether to decide, how to decide) and the modes of decision making (Chance/Impulse, Habit/Custom/Tradition/Policy, and Data/Values). Three factors are brought to bear on whether to decide or not to decide: problem values (how important/urgent is the problem); problem bounds (constraints or successful solutions); and problem willingness (desire to respond). The answers to these three "checks" affect the choice of response mode, each of which contains three subprocesses--identifying and formulating alternative solutions, exploring their viability, and choosing the best solution. The Chance/Impulse mode of decision making is most frequently used with issues of little importance, in which little real influence can be brought to bear on the outcome, or in situations in which limited time or data is available for decision making. The Habit/Custom/Tradition/Policy mode is used when the decision to be made is of some significance to the individual and is a decision that has been and is to be faced repeatedly. The Data/Values mode is used when the problem is of great significance, and no relevant habits, customs, traditions, or policies are present that will offer a good solution. Implications for instruction are made, especially in reducing the emphasis on decision making as a purely data-based process. (EJB)

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ONE WAY OF THINKING ABOUT

DECISION MAKING

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ONE WAY OF THINKING ABOUT DECISION MAKING

*The Opportunity To Make A Decision Isn't
A Problem or Headache, It's A Chance to
Exercise Some Control Over Your Life.*

An obvious goal of education is to improve the students' ability to make rational decisions. In the belief that data is the base for all decision making, instruction has historically emphasized giving students data and concepts educators feel they'll need to make and implement the range of decisions they'll confront throughout their lives. The assumption is that if teachers do this, the students will make "good" decisions. Working with concepts and data also necessitates the need for students to be able to generate, evaluate, and organize data on their own. As a result, most curricula also stress the development of these intellectual abilities.

Despite the fact that more and new facts and concepts continue to be added to the curriculum in the hopes that education can be more effective for students, it's clear that the decision-making related outcomes of such programs continue to fall far short of our expectations. Students continue to make decisions that have negative effects on their lives, the lives of others, and their natural environment. Perhaps this is so because we're not giving the students enough data and information. Perhaps this is so because students are just unable to acquire the masses of data that they'll need for effective decision making throughout their lives. Or, perhaps current programs fall short of our expectations because to deal with concepts, data, and data generating, evaluating and organizing skills alone, and expect we are facilitating one development of students as rational decision makers, is a false hope.

DECISION MAKING AS PROBLEM SOLVING

It may be that one source of the disappointments educators experience lies in the concept of decision making being taught. Or, it might be that the way decision making is being taught is in need of some rethinking.

Decision making is the act of trying to find a suitable solution for a certain kind of problem. Usually the solution sought is a course of action to be implemented, *to decide what should be done about*, or to make a value judgment, *to decide whether _____ is good or bad, whether I agree or disagree, and so on*. For example, decision making in the area of health education centers on such issues as:

- What foods should (and shouldn't) I eat?
- What kind of physical activity should I engage in?
- What should I do for my cold?
- Should I smoke?
- What kinds of immunization should I get?
- How should I vote on the fluoridation issue?
- What should I do if I drink and have to get somewhere that requires driving?
- How frequently should I visit my physician and dentist for a checkup?
- Should I (we) use family planning measures?
- What factors should I consider before using any non-prescription medicines?
- Should I experiment with pot?
- What should I do when I feel awkward in a group?

While decision making is problem solving, not all problem solving is decision making. Inquiring is a way of solving some other kinds of problems. In inquiring, people use a network of inquiry processes in search of "value-free" solutions, theories or explanations.* In the area of health education, inquiry invites students to build solutions for problems such as:

- Despite the abundance of a variety of relatively inexpensive foods available in the United States, why are there so many people who suffer from poor nutrition?

*For a detailed discussion of Inquiry, see Strasser, et.al., "TEACHING TOWARD INQUIRY," Schools for the 70's Action Series, National Educational Association, Washington, D.C., 1971.

- Even though there are known VD prevention measures, why is the incidence of gonorrhea and syphilis infections increasing at an alarming rate?
- Why is it that over \$2,000,000,000 a year is spent in the United States for fake remedies and quack cures for illness?

In reviewing decision making and inquiry as two kinds of problem solving, it is important to highlight a significant difference between them. Theories or explanations in inquiry are judged not on how well someone likes them, but rather on how well they fit with the data available. In inquiry, data "rules" as the prime base to evaluate "good" theories. Imagine, for example, that an individual or group spends considerable time and energy to develop an explanation for the current surge in the occurrence of venereal diseases. As a result of this effort, they report a theory they've developed which is consistent with their data. If their theory is a good one, it should probably also fit with data others may generate or have generated in similar inquiries. A theory or explanation which was developed through honest inquiry and which is viewed as good by some is generally viewed as good by others as well. If the data fits with the theory or explanation, it fits. If the data doesn't fit with the theory for one, the same data probably won't fit for others. The intent of inquiry, therefore, is to attempt to produce "individual proof" solutions by using inquiry processes that yield theories as value free as humanly possible.

As value free as inquiry is intended to be, decision making is just the opposite. While data are also utilized in making decisions, decision making centers on individual or group values, depending on whether individual or group decision making is involved. Data serves as evidence the decision maker uses to determine the degree to which his or her priority values are represented in the alternative solutions considered. While theories or explanations developed through inquiry are intended to be "true for all," the product of decision making is intended to be appropriate primarily for the decision maker. Whether others like the solution or not is of a lesser concern.

A (ONE) MODEL OF DECISION MAKING

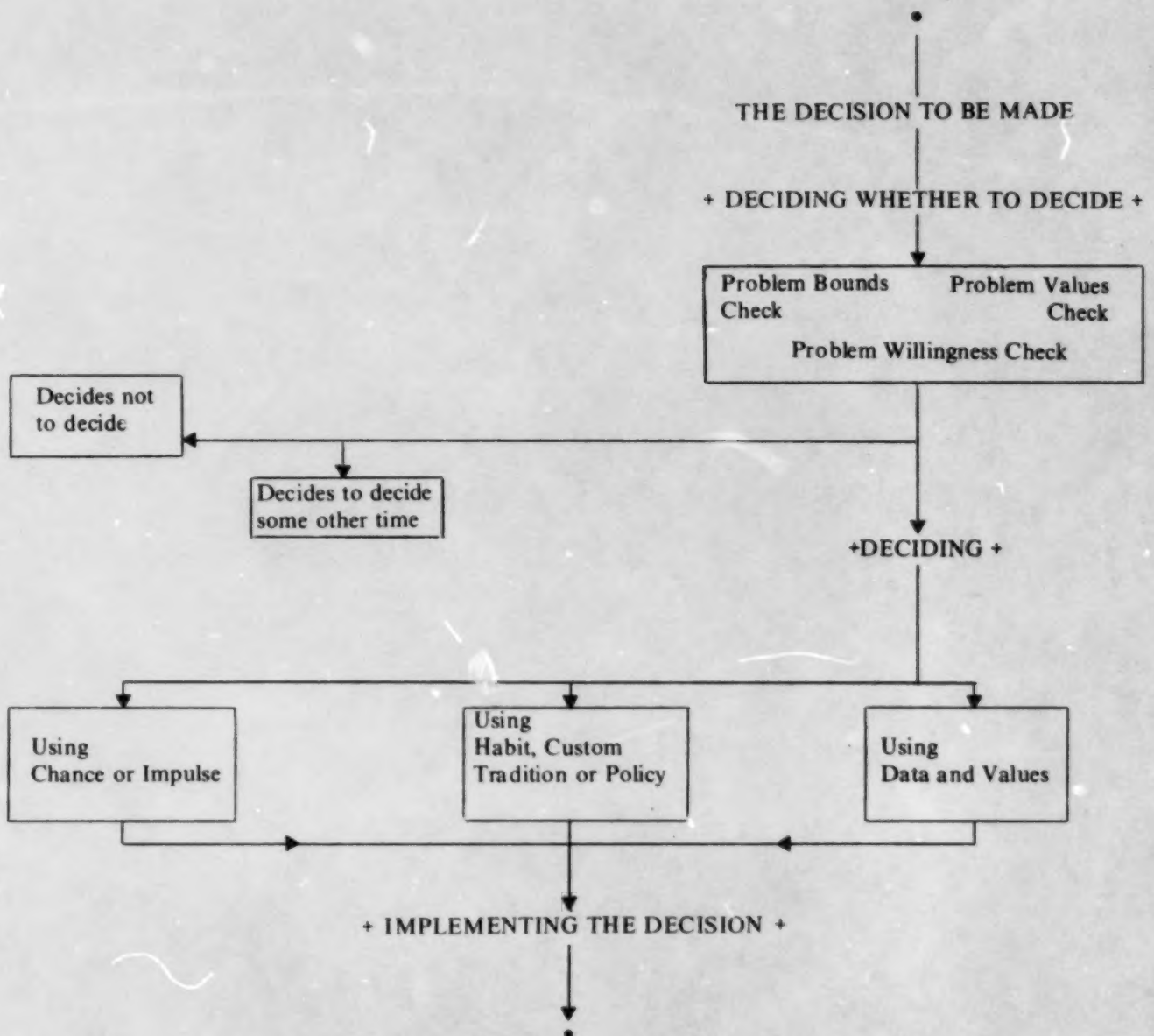
What follows is one way of thinking about the act of decision making developed by the authors. There are two reasons why previously available models of decision making were felt inadequate. First, while several of these models allude to values as influencing decision making, the way that this influence is felt is not outlined. The second reason it was necessary to develop a model of decision making is that other models we found dealt only with the act of making very involved, important, or "rational" decisions. Other ways of making life's less critical or less significant decisions are ignored. It's as though one doesn't make a decision unless it's a very significant one. It is the purpose of the DALSTRA Model of Decision Making to account for these two shortcomings of other models of decision making. The influence of values is outlined and the model accounts for the variety of ways people make decisions in their day-to-day lives.

The DALSTRA Model of Decision Making is not intended to be a highly detailed view of decision making, nor is it intended to outline how decisions should be made. Rather, it is a descriptive statement about different ways individuals or groups respond to different kinds of decision-making problems they encounter. Furthermore, while the model may seem to be highly academic in written form, we emphasize that these processes happen many times throughout the day - most frequently at the intuitive level.

In this model, decision making is treated in two phases: the decision-making antecedents and the three modes or ways of making decisions. The decision-making antecedents are discussed first: deciding whether to decide and how to decide. Then, the Chance or Impulse Mode of Decision Making; the Habit, Custom, Tradition or Policy Mode of Decision Making; and the Data and Values Mode of Decision Making are reviewed.

Once a decision is made, if the decision involves doing something, that action must be implemented using whatever means is appropriate. Since the act of implementing a decision is beyond the act of decision making, we have chosen not to include a discussion of ways decisions may be implemented in this material.

A (ONE) MODEL OF DECISION MAKING



DECIDING WHETHER TO DECIDE: THE DECISION-MAKING ANTECEDENTS

Decision making has been defined earlier as the act of identifying and selecting a solution for a problem. Before actual decision making is initiated, however, some other kinds of things happen. Obviously, the individual or group must first be aware of the need to decide; she or he must be aware of the problem. Then, three other issues emerge. In responding to questions such as *How important is it that the problem be solved?* and/or *How urgent is the problem?* the individual is doing a **PROBLEM VALUES CHECK**. It's one way of determining how significant the problem is for the individual as he or she relates the problem to his or her values.

Depending on the problem, thought may also be given to the question, *What constraints act on a successful solution for the problem?* Doing so is referred to as doing a **PROBLEM BOUNDS CHECK**. It centers on finding out about the nature of the problem itself which is necessary if a successful solution is to be found and implemented. Finally, the individual may give thought to questions such as, *Do I have to or want to respond to the problem? Am I ready and willing to respond to the problem?* In this case, the decision maker considers his or her own feelings about the decision to be made. This is referred to as a **PROBLEM WILLINGNESS CHECK**.

As an outgrowth of these decision-making antecedents, that may be done in any sequence, the individual may decide not to decide, or to decide at some other time. On the other hand, the individual may feel the problem needs attention so the act of decision making is initiated. Since there are different ways the decision may be made, the responses to the **PROBLEM VALUES CHECK**, the **PROBLEM BOUNDS CHECK** and the **PROBLEM WILLINGNESS CHECK** serve as the bases from which the specific way of making the decision is determined. For example, given a problem determined to be relatively unimportant to the individual with relatively few constraints that bear on a successful solution, the Chance or Impulse Mode of Decision Making may be utilized.

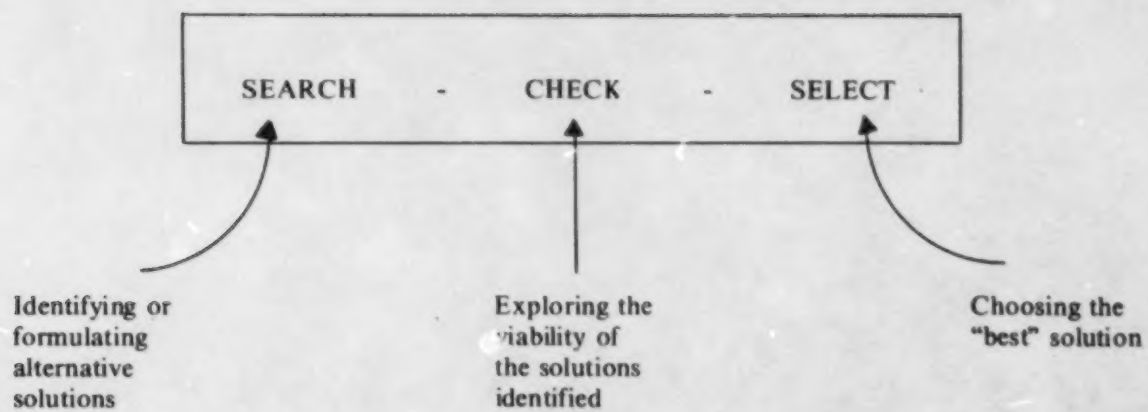
Before turning to a discussion of these three modes of decision-making, we note that by commenting about the decision-making antecedents we are not suggesting that all decision making should be a systematic and highly intellectual process. Nothing could be further from the truth. In most individual decision making, these antecedents usually happen at the intuitive or subconscious level, almost in the twinkling of an eye. In group decision making they are usually treated in a more deliberate and/or systematic way.

MAKING DECISIONS IN DIFFERENT WAYS

In the area of health, the kinds of decisions people make range from incidental matters like *What kind of bath soap should I buy?* to issues of more significance such as, *What immunizations should I have?* Some decisions are easy because they deal with incidental matters. Other decisions are more difficult because the issues are of greater significance. Because the kinds of decisions people make range from the incidental to the significant, the ways people make decisions also differ. Some decisions are made by using chance or impulse as a base to decide. Some decisions are made by referring to a habit, custom, tradition, or a policy for a solution. That's all that's necessary. Some decisions, on the other hand, involve the more complex processes of explicating one's values relative to the decision to be made and generating data about the alternative solutions. This data and values mode of decision making may take from moments to days.

While these three ways of making decisions range in complexity, one way of deciding isn't necessarily better than the others. Rather, it's a question of which decision-making mode is most appropriate for the decision to be made.

As each of these decision-making modes is reviewed in the material that follows, they are discussed by relating each mode to three basic elements common to all decision-making. These elements are:



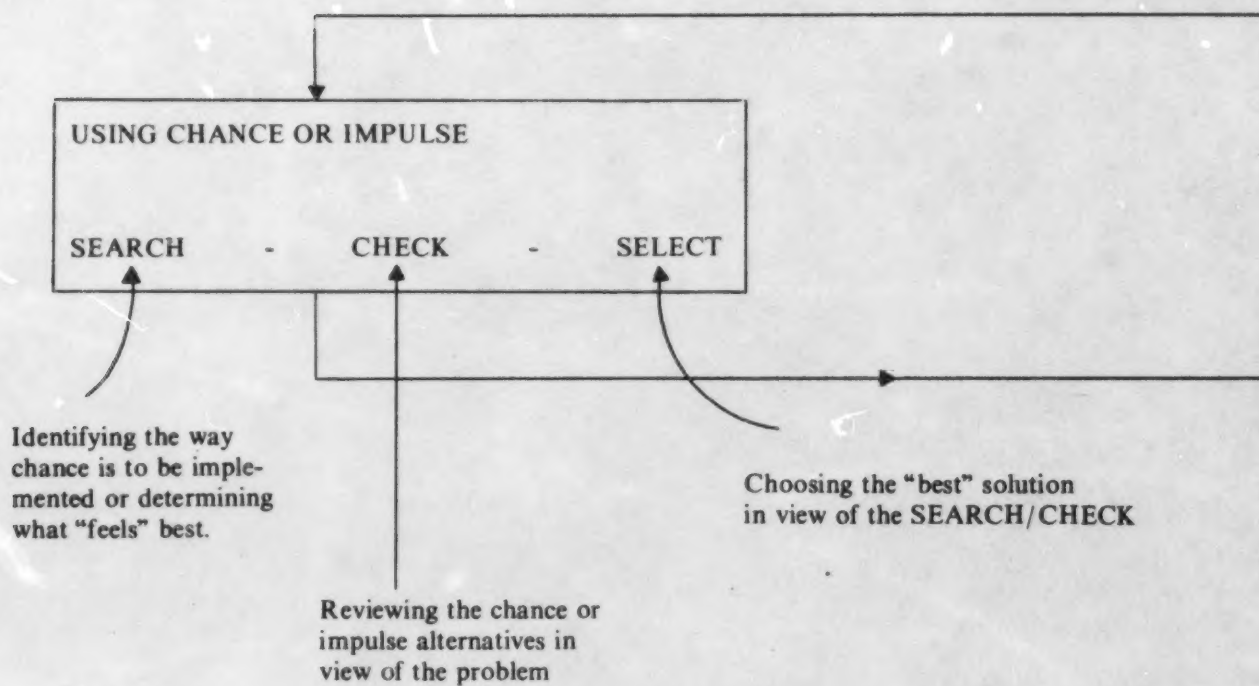
While we have listed these three elements of each decision-making mode in an apparent sequence, it must be emphasized the people are creative thinkers. There are an infinite variety of ways these three elements may be implemented. For example, an individual may initiate and continue the "search" until several solutions are identified. Then the solutions may be "checked." In other instances, one solution may be identified, then checked. If it is found wanting, another solution may be sought, and so on. Even though there is individual variety in the way decisions are made, however, there is a recognizable progression from Search, to Check, to Select, which can be identified in the analysis of any decision made.

USING CHANCE OR IMPULSE TO DECIDE

In some instances, an individual finds it necessary to make a decision about an issue that may not be very important to him or very significant in his life. Or, it may be that while the issue is important, she or he feels it is impossible to exert any real influence on the outcome. There may also be occasions in which either an individual has only a very limited time to decide, or the data needed in order to make a more systematic decision isn't available. As a result, the decision may be made by chance or impulse.

Utilizing this way of making decisions involves selecting a solution by flipping a coin or by letting events take their course without intervention. Or, the individual (or group) may just pick a solution because it "feels OK" or "seems OK." Unquestionably, deciding by chance or impulse is the least complex way of making a decision. Of course, since one's values are a prime base for any decision making, values are involved in this mode, though indirectly. That is, to make a decision by chance suggests that the outcome was not very significant as far as the individual's values are concerned. Or when selecting a solution because it "feels OK" or "seems OK" suggests that the solution selected has passed an intuitive values check.

When reviewed in terms of the search, check, and select elements of decision making, the Chance-Impulse way of making decisions seems to be least discrete in terms of the processes used. Emphasis of the search in Chance or Impulse decision making is directed toward selecting what way chance will be implemented or what feels best. The "check" is little more than a review of the chance or impulse considered in relation to the problem significance. This review is then followed by selecting the particular way to implement chance or that impulse solution that seems most appropriate.



There is no doubt that the Chance or Impulse way of making decisions is probably used more frequently than either of the other decision-making modes. And rightly so. It's doubtful that anyone could hold on to his or her sanity if all of the hundreds of decisions to be made during the day were given the kind of attention characteristic of the other more complex ways of making decisions.

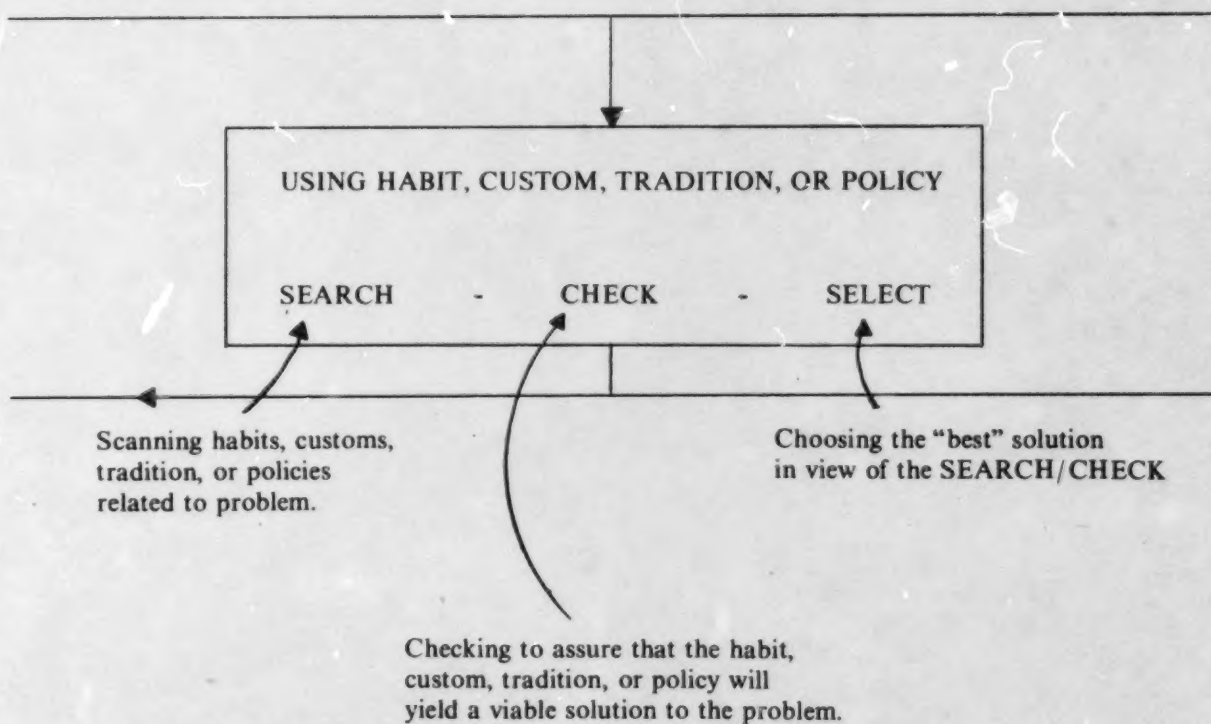
USING HABIT, CUSTOM, TRADITION OR POLICY TO DECIDE

Another way people cope with the unending stream of decisions to be made is to utilize the Habit, Custom, Tradition or Policy Mode of Decision Making. Generally, this way of making decisions is used when the decision to be made is of some significance to the individual and is a decision that has been and is to be faced repeatedly.

Making decisions by habit means using a solution again that has worked in the past in similar situations. Habit is a kind of ritualized behavior for an individual that happens almost without any deliberate thought. Making decisions by custom refers to the use of some "norm" as a base to decide. *That's the way everybody does it.* Custom is a kind of informal rule of conduct or behavior. Tradition, on the other hand, is a more formalized or institutionalized kind of custom that is frequently defined by religious, social, family, group or cultural mores. Tradition is characterized as a custom that is handed down from generation to generation.

Policies, like habits, customs, or traditions are solutions to problems before they arise. Policies are formally explicated rules that enable a group to decide about complicated problems systematically with relative ease and a minimum of time. Usually the need for a policy arises when a group finds itself having to make the same kind of decision again and again. A policy is formulated (using the Data and Values Mode of Decision Making to be discussed next) and the decision-making time is minimized.

When viewed in terms of the search, check and select elements of decision making, these processes appear to be more discrete than in the Chance or Impulse Mode of Decision Making. The search involves a scanning of habits, customs, traditions or policies believed to be relative to the problem. Once a search is made, a check is done to assure that the habit, custom, tradition or policy identified will yield a viable solution to the problem at hand. Finally, the specific solution to be implemented is selected.



While values don't appear to be directly involved in the Habit, Custom, Tradition or Policy Mode of Decision Making, they are, nonetheless, very critically felt. Frequently, the habits, customs, traditions or policies utilized were originally developed through the third mode of decision making yet to be discussed: the Data and Values Mode of Decision Making.

USING DATA AND VALUES TO DECIDE

The data and values way of making decisions is decidedly more considered, deliberate, and systematic than the other two modes of decision making previously discussed. Usually this mode of decision making is used because the problem is of great significance and there are no relevant habits, customs, traditions or policies that will offer a good solution. With the exception of the role of values in the process to be outlined, this mode of decision making comes closest to the way many others have described "rational" decision making.

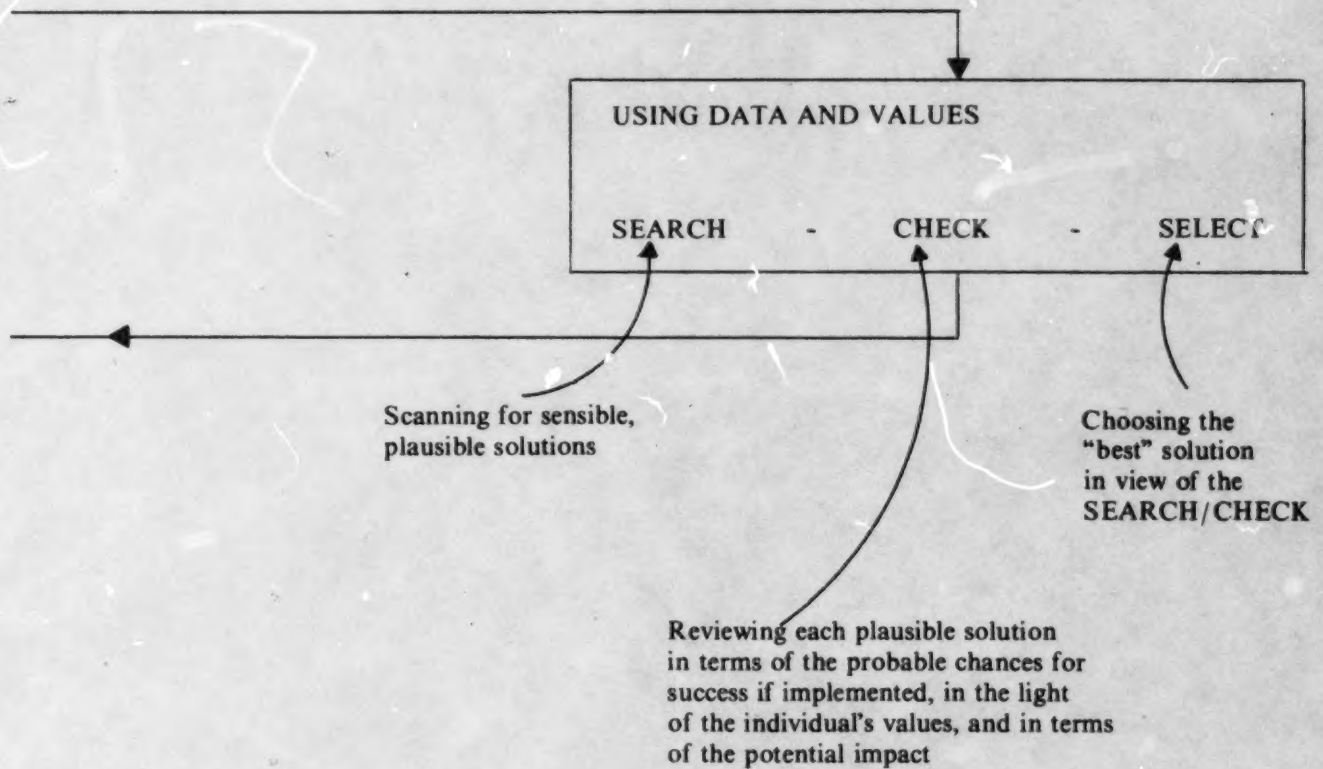
As in the case of the other decision-making modes, the three elements, search, check, and select, apply to this way of making decisions as well. Data and values decision making begins with a search for plausible, sensible solutions. To do so, the individual may brainstorm possibilities, glean ideas from others, use written materials or whatever. With some plausible solutions identified, those solutions are usually submitted to the three kinds of checks.

A probability check involves reviewing each plausible solution in terms of its chances for success. Usually this involves generating data from which predictions about potential success are made. As a result of a probability check, some solutions may be retained, others may be rejected and/or new alternatives may be sought.

In addition to a probability check, an impact check is used to analyze plausible solutions in terms of the effects implementing that solution may have on the individual, other affected and/or the environment. It may also include exploring other problems the proposed solution solves and new problems that may be created.

Another kind of check is what is referred to as a values check. In doing so, the plausible solutions are reviewed in the light of the individuals' values. While a values check may include explicating those values related to the decision to be made, the prime question dealt with is, *How do the plausible solutions and anticipated impact match with what's important to me; with my values?* The values check may then lead to data generating to determine the degree to which the individual's values are represented in the solutions being considered.

Values are crucial to this way of making decisions. In those instances where an individual (or group) either knows or is able to explicate his or her values related to the problem, he or she can utilize those values directed deliberately and openly in making the decision. In those instances in which the individual is unaware of his or her values, those values act at what might be called a subconscious level. That is, a plausible solution may be selected because it "feels right" without really understanding why it is so. One of the difficulties in using an intuitive values base to judge a plausible solution is that the act of decision making is frequently highly frustrating because there are competing values acting on the individual, but he or she is unaware of the source of the conflict. As a result the individual misses what the real issue is, namely, resolving the value conflict.



In view of these three kinds of checks, which may take from moments to months, a plausible solution is selected; the decision is made. To the degree that all of the elements of the Data and Values Decision Making Mode are dealt with thoughtfully, the greater are the chances that the decision will be successful. A decision made only on values or only on data is limited. If none of the plausible solutions are found to be acceptable, other solutions may be sought.

While there's little doubt that the Data and Values Mode of Decision Making is undoubtedly the most complex of the three modes presented, it does bear a close relationship to the Habit, Custom, Tradition or Policy Mode of Decision Making. The data and values mode is used primarily to make new and significant decisions. If a similar decision is to be made at a later date, the same solution may be used again. Thus, a solution first developed through the data and values mode may become a solution which is later applied in the Habit, Custom, Tradition or Policy Mode of Decision Making.

DECISION MAKING, SOME AFTERTHOUGHTS

Following is a potpourri of comments about the Model of Decision Making described. Some are disclaimers; some are added thoughts.

- #1 While at work on a problem, a person may change from one decision-making mode to another in mid-stream or he or she may abort efforts to find a solution either because the problem itself or his or her understanding of it has changed.
- #2 The nature of human beings is such that an individual is usually working on many different problems at the same time, utilizing different decision-making modes and with each decision to be made at a different place in the process.

- #3 Decision making may move from problem to solution freely or haltingly; it may take an instant or a lifetime and may be a pleasurable, anxious or frustrating experience.
- #4 While three ways of making decisions are outlined in the model, it's important to emphasize that one way of making a decision isn't better than another. It's a question of which decision making mode is most appropriate to the decision to be made.
- #5 While a general linear movement through a sequence of decision-making processes may seem to be suggested in the Model, it is recognized that as people usually move back and forth between the various search, check, and select processes as they work toward a decision.
- #6 Because of the way decision making is presented in the model, it may appear that the various decision-making processes involve only thinking. However, people may write down plausible solutions, predicted outcomes, possible impact on others, and so on, as a way to keep track of their thinking.
- #7 To the degree that an individual is aware of his values, data and values decision making can happen more systematically and deliberately.

SOME INFERENCES FOR INSTRUCTION

At the beginning of this paper, we suggested that one source of some of our disappointments with present curricula related to decision making might be the concept of decision making fundamental to such programs. When many present education programs are reviewed, it becomes clear that decision making is taught as though it is a purely data-based process. As a result, a major instructional emphasis in the classroom is on data and data generating, data

validating and data-organizing processes. Certainly data are important in decision making. Without data, any decision could hardly be considered anything but irrational. Without special emphasis on the role of values in decision making, however, the central element of the decision-making process is missing. What decision making is all about — acting on one's values — isn't dealt with. In addition to data, a major thrust of such programs must be on developing the students' concept of value, on developing their ability to explicate their own values, on developing their ability to systematically infer the values of others, and on developing their awareness of their own values in relation to specified issues and concerns of the curriculum.

With the DALSTRA Model of Decision Making in mind, it is possible to view the curriculum from a different perspective. Since the way people exert an impact on their lives is through the range of decisions they make and implement, one major goal of instruction is to shift many of the more significant decisions students make by using the Chance or Impulse Mode of Decision Making to consider habits, customs, tradition or policies or by using the Data and Values Decision Making Mode.

Since making decisions using the Data and Values Decision-Making Mode rests on using data and concepts, information acquisition and concept development goals for instruction take on a new meaning. This decision-making mode also rests on the effective use of data generating, data organizing and data processing skills. Thus, the need for skill development goals is also reinforced. In addition, because this mode of decision-making also rests on the student's awareness of his or her own values, a values awareness goal for instruction gains new significance. The decision-making mode also suggests that, in addition to becoming informed about the different ways people make decisions, students also need opportunities to expand their repertoire of decision-making strategies if they are going to implement the Data and Values Decision-Making Mode more systematically, deliberately and effectively.